



# Voice

In our every day lives, we are constantly using our voice to communicate our thoughts, feelings and opinions. It is important to understand that we need to treat our voice with care and healthy habits or else problems can arise.

## What happens if we mistreat our voice?

- If we continuously engage in bad habits our vocal cords can become swollen.
- When our vocal folds swell they can develop vocal polyps or nodules, which are growths on the vocal folds.
- These growths can impede with the normal functioning and production of our voice (otherwise known as *dysphonia*). For example you may have difficulty speaking and your voice may sound hoarse or unpleasant.

## Types of Mistreatment

### 1) Vocal Abuse

- Vocal abuse is mistreatment/ excess use of the voice that strains the vocal cords.

*Examples of Vocal Abuse:*

- Shouting, screaming, throat clearing, coughing, talking too much, straining the voice to mimic sounds such as sirens or car engines.

### 2) Vocal Misuse

- Vocal misuse is using the voice in an incorrect way.

*Examples of Vocal Misuse:*

- Singing too loudly, speaking too loudly, speaking with an abnormally high or low pitch.

## Tips for Encouraging Healthy Voice Habits

*(Ways to reduce vocal abuse and misuse)*

- Observe your child throughout each day and identify when your child's vocal abuse or misuse occurs. Keep a list of these instances so that you can inform your physician or speech pathologist.
- Encourage the use of soft and quiet voices. This will limit the use of loud speech. You do not want to frustrate your child by

constantly correcting them so use your own judgment as to when to remind your child about using their quiet and soft voice.

- Be a good model for your child by keeping your voice soft, quiet and at a proper pitch and loudness level.
- Encourage turn taking within family discussions. This will eliminate the need to yell to get someone's attention or to talk loudly to talk over someone.
- Eliminate any background noise such as the TV volume, music volume or video game volume. This will reduce the need to talk loudly to talk over the noise.
- Introduce alternate ideas for voice use. If you are going to a football game or sporting event bring posters and noisemakers such as bells or horns instead of yelling to cheer. Use clapping or whistling to get someone's attention instead of yelling.
- Try to limit the use of non-speech sounds that your child uses, such as mimicking the sounds of airplanes, cars, horns, sirens etc. Use other sounds such as "sh" as this is not as harsh on the voice compared to using the high pitch screeching sounds that are normally used to imitate.
- Praise your child when they use good vocal habits. Reward them for these positive actions in whatever way you see fit. Be positive and encouraging!
- Vocal rest is very important. If your child comes home from school or day care with a hoarse voice try to encourage quiet activities such as colouring, drawing or playing with blocks, as these activities don't require a lot of talking.
- Be aware of any changes to your child's voice and keep track of the amount of colds and upper respiratory tract infections your child has as these can also harm your child's voice. Be sure to notify your physician or speech pathologist about any concerns.

